

In the real world, living wage makes a difference

The Gazette is glad it won't have to publish any more editorials ("Living wage compromise," March 15) on the subject of the living wage. And thousands of readers, including me, will be grateful that we will not have to read them.

In The Gazette's world, the living wage bill is a union-inspired attempt to "stop privatization of county services."

In the real world, the idea of a living wage is an old idea, advocated by Teddy Roosevelt and paid by Henry Ford. Many organizations whose members are strong supporters have nothing personally to gain from a living wage. The Montgomery County Education Association supports it because teachers see the corrosive effects

of poverty on educational performance.

In The Gazette's world, only the federal government should set a wage floor.

In the real world, almost 80 jurisdictions in the United States have passed living wage laws. Moreover, 10 states and the District of Columbia have minimum wage requirements that are significantly higher than the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour (a paltry \$10,700 per year).

For most people, the question isn't whether government should establish a wage floor. The question is what constitutes a meaningful wage floor.

The Montgomery County living wage bill would establish a wage floor of \$10.50 per hour (only \$21,800 per year), with a

credit for employer-paid health insurance.

It would apply to employees of for-profit contractors with 10 or more employees who are paid through a county contract for services worth \$50,000 or more.

A recent study by Wider Opportunities for Women indicated that two adults earning about \$10.50 per hour can support a family of four in Montgomery County.

In The Gazette's world, a living wage law gives ammunition to those who want to label the county anti-business. In the real world, there are many business people who support and pay a living wage. They understand that higher wages decrease employee turnover, and increase productivity and service

quality. There is no evidence that any jurisdiction with a living wage law has seen any harmful effect on its economy.

In The Gazette's world, the living wage bill is a fake solution to a real problem because it would only help about 2,000 families.

In the real world, most people think that helping 2,000 families is well worth doing. Workers understand that there is nothing fake about having more money in their pockets as a result of increased wages. They recognize that a \$2 increase in hourly pay equals \$4,000 more a year, enough to feed a family for a year. In contrast, in tax year 2000, the local earned income tax credit, lauded by The Gazette as

superior to a living wage, provided an average of only \$280 per year to eligible families — about 77 cents a day.

I don't expect to ever persuade Gazette editorial writers that a living wage law at the local level is a good idea. Fortunately I don't have to. The living wage bill has broad public support and a majority of the council as sponsors. As in many other jurisdictions, a living wage law will make a profound difference for many workers and their families. That's why I am working hard for the law.

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